

Alpine County Choose Civility Campaign

(An initiative of the Child Abuse Prevention Council and County Superintendent of Schools)



April Focus:

Assert Yourself

Being assertive is about expressing yourself in a civil manner that respects both your needs and the needs of others. Assertiveness is being able to express your feelings, thoughts, beliefs and opinions in an open manner that doesn't violate the rights of others. Being assertive can allow you to establish firm personal boundaries by saying no. Asserting yourself can stop others from taking advantage of you. Asserting yourself is a civil way of communicating as you can see when you compare it to being aggressive.

This visual gives some perspective on how assertiveness is different from being passive or being aggressive:

<u>Passive</u>	<u>Assertive</u>	<u>Aggressive</u>
May violate your own rights because you give others' needs priority over your own.	Respects both your own rights and the rights of others.	Violates the rights of others by making your own needs the priority.

There are very important differences between stating your needs assertively and stating them aggressively. There are differences in the words used, the tone taken and the body language used.

We are learning that non assertive behavior can actually be a health risk. Self-neglect and over compliance can harm the functioning of our immune systems, leaving us more vulnerable to illness. Being assertive is an important communication skill which can reduce depression and anxiety and improve self esteem.

There are many reasons people need to assert themselves and should do so in a civil manner:

- You may need to stand up for yourself or others.
- Saying no, especially when someone infringes upon your personal space or safety.

- You may need to ask for help.
- You may have been wronged and need to improve a situation.
- There is a decision to be made and you have input.
- There needs to be some action taken and you have ideas on how to do that.
- You have a solution to a problem to share.
- You need to establish some personal boundaries because others are infringing too much on your time.
- Someone is pushing you to do something you know you shouldn't do or don't want to do.

A number of factors can stop us from being assertive:

- Self-defeating beliefs.
- We don't have the verbal skills to be assertive.
- We are anxious or feel stressed.
- It can be hard to evaluate a situation to determine which behaviors fit.
- Cultural or generational influences may dictate how assertive we are.

Many times asserting yourself simply means saying no:

- No, thank you.
- No, I prefer not to.
- No, that's not what I had in mind.
- No, I can't do that.
- No, I'm not prepared to do that.
- No, I don't think I should.
- No, I don't think that's a good idea.

Concrete advice for how to be assertive includes:

- Look directly at the other person to convey you are serious.
- Use a direct, firm voice without anger or a threatening tone.
- Avoid put downs.
- Treat the other person with respect.
- You can use this simple formula to state your needs: "When you do _____, I feel _____. I would like you to _____."

According to the Centre for Clinical Interventions, some different kinds of assertions include:

- Basic Assertion: make a statement that expresses clearly our needs, opinions or feelings. An example is, "I feel hurt by that statement."
- Empathic Assertion: try to understand another person's feelings or needs. An example is, "I know you're busy at the moment, but I'd like to make a request of you."
- Consequence Assertion: a strong form of assertion which is usually a last resort, "If this occurs again, I'm left with no alternative but to use a formal disciplinary action and I prefer not to."

- Discrepancy Assertion: point out a discrepancy between something that was previously agreed upon and what is actually happening. “As I understand it, we agreed to use the guidelines we learned during the Choose Civility campaign for our meetings, but we have not been following what we agreed on. We need to clarify our behaviors.”
- Negative Feeling Assertion: this is used when you feel negative about a behavior. “When you come home late without telling me before, I worry that something is wrong and I feel scared. I would really appreciate it if you could call and let me know beforehand.”

Can you tell how the examples above allow you to assert yourself without being too passive or overly aggressive? These provide us with ways we can model assertiveness to our children. It is especially important to teach our children how to say no, set boundaries and stand up for their rights. With these examples, we can lead them toward assertiveness and away from aggressiveness. Being too aggressive can cause arguments, fights, hurt feelings and actually work against being heard. Many of us do not appreciate or listen to aggressive demands but will work with those who assert their needs and requests in civil ways.

Books about Asserting Yourself

The Assertiveness Workbook: How to Express Your Ideas and Stand Up for Yourself by Randy J. Paterson, Ph.D. is a book for adults. According to the author, a lack of assertiveness can leave you feeling powerless. The book contains techniques to help you become more assertive and set personal boundaries.

Raising Assertive Children is a brand new book for parents by Frank McGinty about boosting children’s assertiveness skills.

Squashed in the Middle by Elizabeth Winthrop is a delightful picture book for preschool through third grade about a middle child who wants to be heard.